

A year ago, I was on sabbatical with my husband and son in Tel Aviv. Although I was sorry to miss Cantor Steve's first *Kol Nidrei* at OZ, I was privileged to be able to experience Yom Kippur in Israel. It was an amazing experience. This year, as the High Holidays approached, I revisited those memories and what they taught me.

Tel Aviv is, of course, a majority Jewish city, but it is also a largely *hiloni* or secular city. So I didn't know exactly what to expect on Yom Kippur. I had heard that in the evening, bands of children take over the empty streets on their bicycles, and indeed that was true. As we walked back to our flat from the Great Synagogue after *Kol Nidrei*, it was delightful to see and hear laughing, chatting youngsters wheeling about the roads that they now owned.

But the atmosphere the *next* day is what has stayed with me.

Tel Aviv is a bustling metropolis of over four hundred thousand people, a tech hub, a tourist magnet. We were living in the very heart of the city, right off Rothschild Boulevard. Elegant and civilized, but busy!

On Yom Kippur our neighborhood was transformed. It completely shut down. Except for the synagogues, everything was closed. But it was a beautiful fall day and couples and families were out walking along Rothschild as they always do. Small groups sat on benches or the patches of AstroTurf in the parks down the middle of the boulevard.

I was familiar with this scene from Shabbat, yet the tone on Yom Kippur was different. For one thing, there was no traffic. Literally none. In twenty-four hours we saw two motor vehicles moving. At one point my husband and I walked up the middle of Ibn Gvirol, ordinarily one of the busiest avenues in the city.

But it was more than that. People spoke quietly. They kept their phones tucked away; *that* certainly contributed to the calm. But there was still something else. Suddenly it struck me: No one was having a picnic. In a city that runs on caffeine, no one even had a cup of coffee in their hand. Now there is no law against public eating on Yom Kippur in Tel Aviv, but still, no one did. To be sure, plenty of Tel Avivians don't fast. At one point we walked past a ground-floor apartment from which the clink of dishes clearly indicated lunch. But despite the bright sun they had drawn their curtains. How easy would it have been for the strollers to grab their coffee mug, for the diners to let in the sun....

I am a suburban American Jew. I have fasted on Yom Kippur since I was 12 years old, when my mom let me practice before it became an obligation. Yet I had never before fasted surrounded by total strangers who were actively, if anonymously, respecting and supporting that fast, regardless of their own personal beliefs or traditions.

What I think I experienced that day was *kehilla* – holy community. It is a collective human act, and it generated a profoundly satisfying congruence between the holiness of the day and the sense of place.

Kehilla is born of respect. And it is what Ohavi Zedek offers at its best. We are a community characterized by a broad diversity of backgrounds, traditions, practices, beliefs, and needs. And we offer so much: meaningful and joyous services, celebrations, moments of reflection, Hebrew School, Pre-School, our Shalom Shuk, singing, guest speakers, displays of anti-racism work on our front lawn, Stopping Stones, interfaith outreach, vibrant teen programs, book groups, the Lost Mural, and new ideas being brought forth by our congregants. We thrive because we foster respect and understanding across all our differences. Like those putatively secular Tel-Avivians who left their coffee cups at home or shut their curtains during lunch, each and every one of us can bring some act, some gift, some skill, or some idea to make our community flourish. At this moment in particular, we need all of those offerings. I invite you to

join us and get involved on the board, on a committee, as a funder, or however you want to contribute. We must gather together more, meet more of one another, listen more, build more, get in more good trouble, reach out more to the unaffiliated, reach in more to the disaffected. When we do, we will feel a contentment akin to my revelation on Rothschild Boulevard last year.

We are all conscious of the challenges of the year that has ended. As 5781 begins, I know that we all fear what it will bring. To do our part for a *shana tova yoter* – a better year - we cannot do better than to face the future with honesty, hope, pragmatism, and an ongoing commitment to *kehilla* – our holy community.

~ Nathaniel Lew